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PROGRAM ABC World News Tonight STATION WJLA TV  
ABC Network

DATE February 4, 1982 7:00 PM CITY Washington, DC

SUBJECT Argentinian Plan Not Denied

SAM DONALDSON: Last night on this broadcast, our White House correspondent, Sam Donaldson, reported that the United States had talked with Argentina about the use of Argentinian forces in Nicaragua, both to cut off the flow of arms to El Salvador but also to undermine and overthrow the Sandinista government in Nicaragua.

The story has been greeted with a string of "no comments" but also no denials.

Here again is Sam Donaldson.

SAM DONALDSON: The Administration is pursuing a plan to bring down the left-wing Sandinista government of Nicaragua, according to both congressional and Administration sources, maneuvering to see it replaced by a non-Marxist-oriented regime.

On the one hand, Washington is working hard to bankrupt the Sandinista government. US foreign aid has been cut off; international lending institutions have been pressured not to make loans. Mexico, which helped make up a huge deficit last year, has been asked not to do it again this year.

On the other hand, reports persist that Washington is encouraging Argentina to infiltrate para-military forces into Nicaragua to help overthrow the Sandinistas.

Although some Washington sources say such discussions with Argentina never went anywhere, a Nicaraguan army spokesman told ABC News today that eyewitnesses exist who have seen Argentine soldiers dressed in fatigues training rebels near the Honduran border. The eyewitnesses have not been produced.

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And in New York, the Nicaraguan Foreign Minister professed to believe the reports of such a plot.

FOREIGN MINISTER D'ESCOTO: We have manifestations of involvement of Argentinian military personnel at very high levels with the Nicaraguan counter-revolutionary effort. And obviously, everyone knows the attitude of the United States government with regard to our revolution and with regard to our government.

DONALDSON: White House spokesman David Gergin was invited to state flatly that the Administration is not attempting to bring down the Nicaraguan government. Hours later he posted this reply: "We just don't comment on questions of that kind. But no inference should be drawn from that."

Sam Donaldson, ABC News, the White House.